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MIGRATORY FARM LABOR
IN THE
STRAWBERRY PRODUCTION AREA
OF
WESTERN KENTUCKY

By

Robert M. Dinkel

Labor Division
U.S. Farm Security Administration
U. S. Department of Agriculture

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To: N. Gregory Silvermaster, Director, Labor Division

From: Samuel Liss, Senior Economist, Labor Division

Subject: Report on Migratory Farm Labor in the
Strawberry Production Area of Western Kentucky

Submitted herewith is a report on the above subject prepared by Mr. Robert M. Dinkel of this Division. This report is based on a field survey conducted under my supervision for the Labor Division of the Farm Security Administration during the ten-day period May 27 through June 5, 1940. A total of 273 workers schedules and 52 farm operators schedules were filled out by the five enumerators who were employed for this work.

A preliminary report on the findings of this survey was submitted by me in September 1940 under the title of "Summary Report on Labor Conditions in Strawberry Harvesting in Western Kentucky with Brief Notes on the Migratory Labor Situation in Western Tennessee and North Central Arkansas". Mr. Dinkel's report, herewith presented, treats these findings in greater statistical detail.

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THE STRAWBERRY PRODUCTION AREA

of

WESTERN KENTUCKY

PART I

A Production characteristics of the area

Kentucky has grown from 6,700 to 10,000 acres of commercial strawberries each year from 1933 to 1940. The value of this crop each season has ranged between one-half and one million dollars, with the average being about \$840,000.^{1/} Production of the berries is heavily concentrated in a small number of counties. Seven^{2/} counties on the western tip of the state together account for about 60 per cent of the total crop.^{3/} The area in which these counties are located has its eastern, northern, and western boundaries formed by the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers.

Farming in this area, for the most part, is self-sufficing. Land is worked by farmers operating small acreages which produce a variety of crops: tobacco, corn, hay, wheat, beans, cabbage, tomatoes, turnips and other vegetables, a number of different cover crops and strawberries. Tobacco and strawberries are the two major cash crops.

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- 1/ Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station--Thirty Years of Farm Prices and Production in Kentucky. Bulletin No. 403, May, 1940.
2/ Ballard, Calloway, Carlisle, Graves, Livingston, Marshall and McCracken
3/ U. S. Census, 1940 -- Agriculture, Kentucky. Second Series, pp. 68-75

The area is well suited for the commercial growing of strawberries. Since only a few acres are needed, the many small farms of this part of the state are sufficiently large to give profitable yields. Since the ripening season follows that of the major berry producing states of the South, the berries of Kentucky can usually be sold at a time when the demand for them is relatively good. This sale in May and June adds cash to the farm income of the area at a time when few other crops are ready for the market.

The value of strawberries as a cash crop was one of the important reasons for their commercial growth on a large scale in this area since about 1913. Since then, the number of acres planted to strawberries has increased and the proportion of the total state crop has become greater. In 1929, West Kentucky harvested 2,613 of the 6,557 acres in the state, or about 40 per cent of the total. Ten years later, the area accounted for 4,666 out of the 8,205 acres in the state, or about 58 per cent of the total. During this decade, Marshall and Graves counties particularly increased the acreage planted to berries. As a result, Marshall County became the leading strawberry producer in the state. It was followed by McCracken County which is contiguous to Marshall. Together, the two counties account for 38 percent of the state crop. Berries make up over 20 per cent of the total value of farm crops harvested in Marshall and McCracken.^{1/}

^{1/} U.S. Census, 1940--Agriculture, Kentucky. Second and Third Series.

The great majority of strawberry farms in West Kentucky is small. In almost every county, the average number of acres is less than three.^{1/} The largest strawberry farm in the area in 1940 was 140 acres located in Livingston County. It was broken down into three separate tracts of about equal size. In McCracken county more than three out of every four patches were less than five acres in size; one out of every five was between five and nine acres; and only one out of every 40 farms had 10 acres or more.

The average yield per acre was between 50 to 60 crates for almost all of the counties in the area.^{2/} A general estimate of costs shows an expenditure of \$54 per acre up to the picking season and \$1.25 per crate for harvesting. The gross selling price received by one marketing association in Kentucky averaged \$3.34 for the 20 year period from 1917 to 1936. With these yields, costs, and prices received, the average return per acre for the strawberry crop would be under \$75.^{3/} The total return per farm would then be under \$250.

Harvesting begins with the ripening of the first fruit and continues as the berries mature. The average duration of a normal season in West Kentucky is about three weeks--from about May 15 to June 6. There may be significant variations from year to year in these dates. When the season occurs at the normal time, the peak demand for workers comes during the second week from May 22 to May 29th. Although the growers of berries need a large number of workers

^{1/} U.S. Census, 1940--Agriculture, Kentucky. Second Series. pp. 66-75

^{2/} Ibid., pp. 66-75

^{3/} See University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Extension Division--Commercial Strawberry Growing in Kentucky, Circular No. 295, April, 1937. pp. 16-17

during the harvest season, this labor demand comes at a time when it does not seriously conflict with that of other crops.

B. Labor requirements and type of pickers utilized

Labor requirements for harvesting strawberries vary according to yield per acre and the type of labor employed. It has been estimated that six to eight pickers are necessary to harvest a strawberry acre of average yield.^{1/} This estimate does not disclose how much time these pickers will need for such an operation. From facts disclosed by the Fam. Security Administration survey and from general census data, this time can be estimated. The typical work day was one of about six hours duration. The average adult male picker harvested about nine quarts an hour or about 54 quarts a day. At this rate, he would take about 24 days to pick an acre having an average yield in this area of approximately 1,200 quarts. If six pickers of such work ability were utilized, they would take about 4 days to complete the harvest on one acre.

This computation is based upon an employer practice of working the pickers a six-hour day, of using only the number of workers that would be necessary to clear a patch, and employing them day-by-day until the crop had been harvested. Some employers in the area, the survey revealed, were using other practices -- those which increased the number of workers needed. Farmers frequently ordered the picking to be done every other day, especially during the first week of harvesting when not all the berries were ripe. Some farmers during certain periods of the harvest had a shorter work day than six hours

^{1/} Magill, W.W.--Commercial Strawberry Growing in Kentucky, University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Circular No. 295, April 1937, p. 11

in order to avoid exposing the harvested berries to the hot sun of late morning or early afternoon. When the peak of the season was reached, it was the complaint of some of the migrant pickers that the farmers hired "too many 'hands' for his patch".

The total number of workers employed in a normal year picking strawberries at the peak of the season in West Kentucky has been estimated by the U. S. Employment Office at Paducah for an area within a 20-mile radius of that city. For this area, the estimate was 20,000 persons. Since a 20-mile radius includes almost all of the West Kentucky counties that are heavy producers of strawberries, the figure is not much under the total for this part of the state.

The great majority of the farmers in West Kentucky employs only white workers. Their preference in this respect is very strong. This attitude was particularly true of the farmers in Marshall county, the major strawberry producing county in the state. One farmer in that county stated that he never had an opportunity to employ Negro laborers because practically none lived there or passed through the county.

Many of the strawberry growers in this area either preferred migratory pickers or were forced to employ them because of the inadequacy of local labor. Only a small percentage of the farmers have regular wage workers who can be used for the harvest. Recent efforts of the Paducah Employment Office in cooperation with the local W.P.A. office to draw more upon the other local workers for strawberry harvesting have been only moderately successful. The W.P.A. referred to the Employment Office all qualified pickers who were employed on projects or who were certified for W.P.A. work.

The agreement was made that the W.P.A. would expedite the return of the pickers to project work or to relief rolls immediately after the harvesting was completed. From the list of some 1,200 names submitted by the W.P.A. under this agreement, the Employment Office referred about 500 for jobs in the strawberry harvest.

Since the W.P.A. and other local sources do not provide an adequate supply of pickers, the farmers turn to migrants for a substantial number of their workers. Public officials and prominent private individuals estimated that 30 to 40 per cent of the pickers employed during the peak of the season in a normal year is non-local labor. The random sample of the Farm Security Administration survey indicated, however, that 65 per cent of the workers interviewed were migrants. It would thus appear, on a compromise basis, that a total of 10,000 migrants would be a reasonable estimate of the number used during a normal strawberry season in western Kentucky.

Only an insignificant number of migrants is used during hay and corn harvesting and in setting strawberry plants. In general, there are no crops in this area which require either before or after the strawberry harvest any substantial number of non-local agricultural wage workers. In the strawberry harvest, however, it would appear that the demand for migratory pickers will continue at present levels and may even increase above current demands. In all of the counties of the area, but particularly in Marshall county, the trend in strawberry production in the last few years has been consistently upward. The probability is also high that the local labor supply will be inadequate to fill the need for pickers. Dam construction, defense work,

and general increased industrial activity may be expected to absorb many of the local workers during the next few years. It will be necessary, therefore, to continue to obtain a substantial percentage of the needed labor from the migrant group.

C Labor recruiting

Strawberry growers who were interviewed stated, with few exceptions, that they obtained their workers from those who "came to them looking for work." Personal search on their part was used much less frequently. When this method was used, the individual grower would drive his truck to a nearby town or to the railroad loading platform for pickers. In a few instances, he would leave word with a local merchant or garage operator to send pickers to his farm if any stopped looking for work. Only three of the 52 farmers who were interviewed said that they used the U. S. Employment Office in Paducah. One grower in Marshall county said that he did not use the Employment Service because many "hands" were sent out who had never picked berries before. Another grower in the same locality complained that the Office "was no good for berry growers, because one day it would send a large group and the next day it couldn't fill his order."

During the 1940 season the Employment Office received orders for about 3,000 pickers. It succeeded in making approximately 1,400 placements during the months of May and June. This number was double that of the previous year. This increase may be attributed to their intensified recruiting and placement activities. Besides the cooperative agreement with the W.P.A., the Office made several other serious

efforts to organize better the labor market in strawberries. A few hundred letters were mailed to growers and about 5,000 letters to pickers in and around Paducah informing them of the services they could obtain from the Employment Office during the harvest season. All roads leading to Paducah were posted with signs directing pickers to the Office. Radio station WPAD was used at periodic intervals during the day and night informing persons interested in berry picking to contact the Office. Advertisements were also inserted in the local newspapers giving the same information. Finally, the Office arranged for trucks to be ready at the building in which it was located at 6 o'clock each morning to transport pickers to the strawberry fields and back to the city at the end of the day's work. The Employment Office did not hire these trucks, but simply made arrangements for them to be at designated places. The truckers and pickers agreed on the transportation charges.

The comparatively little effect which these noteworthy efforts had in 1940 is indicated by the fact that about 70 per cent of the migrants and about 20 per cent of the local pickers who were interviewed in the Farm Security Administration survey said that they found their jobs through a personal effort on their part, usually by contacting the growers directly. In another 20 per cent of the cases, the workers obtained their job through previous contact with the employer. Almost 60 per cent of the resident pickers secured their jobs either through a friend or through meeting the farmer who hired them on the street. Not one of the local pickers and only a very small number of the migrants reported that they registered or secured work through the

Paducah Employment Office.

Since 1940 was the first season during which the Office made serious efforts to organize the labor market in strawberries in West Kentucky and in view of the progress made that year, it is likely it will receive greater cooperation from both the growers and pickers in coming seasons. A special problem in the organization of this labor market is found in the large number of migrants who each year take to the road for the first time.

About 95 per cent of the growers in the region, representing nearly 90 per cent of the strawberry acreage ship through the McCracken County Growers' Association. Founded in 1914, it is controlled by a Board of Directors, chosen from among the berry growers. Any new grower within trucking distance of the loading and shipping platforms maintained and operated by the Association may become members by growing and packing the standard varieties which it handles. The Association determines some of the labor policies of the growers in the area and may, of course, be expected to have some voice in any major labor issue affecting its members. Thus any plan for the organization of the labor market in this area would have a greater chance of success with the cooperation of this Association.

PART II

THE WORKERS IN THE STRAWBERRY HARVEST

A The Sample

Who the strawberry workers in west Kentucky were and how they lived were investigated more fully by interviewing 273 pickers working during the 1940 season in Ballard, Graves, McCracken, Marshall and Livingston counties. Only a rough sampling plan was followed in the selection of the persons for interview. The places in each county in which there was a concentration of workers were first located. Then the total number of schedules to be obtained was divided among these places in proportion to the number of pickers judged to be employed in each of them. The number of schedules in a place was secured by enumerators who approached pickers at random to obtain the desired data from them. Although no strick sampling plan was followed in the selection of the cases, neither was there any deliberate exclusion or under representation of a particular type of case. It is believed that the general living conditions of workers in the area and some of the uniform facts in their background were revealed by study of the sample group.

Half of the persons from whom interviews were obtained were members of families present in the vicinity of the work field. In such family cases, no matter which member gave the information, the chief agricultural breadwinner present in the area was considered the person who represented the group in the sample. It is thus his personal characteristics, his work pattern, and his living conditions rather than those of the informant that are summarized in this report.

Some of the data, nevertheless, such as that on current housing, pertain equally to all members of the family group.

The other half of the sample was made up of persons in the work area who did not have other family members present therein. In such cases, data were obtained only for the person interviewed although he might have had family members residing in other places. These persons, whether married or single, are referred to in this report as unattached workers.

The 273 cases in the sample group are mainly white males. Ninety-one per cent of the group is made up of males. Eighty-two per cent is of white color. The high percentage of male persons is to a large extent the result of considering the head of a family the representative of that group in the sample. The high percentage of white workers has been partly explained by the statement of one of the growers that they have a strong preference for pickers of that color and that few if any Negroes are found applying for work. That more Negroes do not apply for work is probably the result of their knowing of the prejudice against employing them when a sufficient supply of white workers is available.

The sample includes interstate and intrastate migratory workers as well as non-migrants. Persons who had crossed one or more state boundaries in their search for work during the previous 12 months were classified as interstate migrants. The pickers who had limited their search for work during the same period to places within the state were classified as intrastate migrants. Finally, the individuals who had sought work during the preceding year only in the area

in which employed at the time of interview were considered non-migrants. In the sample group, there are 173 interstate and 23 intrastate migrants and 77 non-migrants.

B Interstate Migrants

1. Characteristics

The interstate migrants were of the male sex, mainly young and of the white race, usually with less than eight years of schooling, mostly unattached, and with relatively few children present among the attached groups. These characteristics are shown in detail in Table 1.

Table 1

Percentage Distribution of Interstate Migrants, by Sex, Race, Age, Schooling, and Family Status

<u>Sex</u>		<u>Family Status</u>		<u>Schooling</u>	
Male	100	Attached	39	Less 5 years	36
Female	0	Unattached	61	5-8 years	46
<u>Age</u>		<u>Race</u>		Over 8 years	15
				Unknown	3
15-24	20	White	76		
25-44	61				
45 & over	19				
		Negro	24		

Although all of the 173 interstate migrants were of the male sex, 67 were living in family groups as head of the household and almost always had their wives with them. These attached groups had in the area 43 children under five years of age and 43 who were between five and 15 years.

Twenty-four per cent of the interstate migrants were of the Negro race. These Negroes were observed working in some patches alongside of White pickers. Thus the strong preference for White workers that was expressed by the growers who were interviewed did not operate to exclude entirely the Negro picker. Such willingness to use Negroes might indicate a large potential supply of migrants for strawberry work in West Kentucky since continued mechanization of farms in the southern states may be expected to displace a large number of tenants and laborers.

The sources of supply from which the interviewed interstate migrants were obtained are indicated by their previous agricultural experience. Some 54 per cent of the group had had only farm laborer experience. The individuals composing this group had never been able to do any climbing on the so-called agricultural ladder. They started at the bottom and stayed there. The jobs they were able to find in their local communities were so few in number, so irregular in occurrence, or so poor paying that they had to seek a radical solution for their low economic status in taking to the road in search of employment in other states.

Thirty-five per cent of the interstate migrants had had a higher agricultural status than that of laborer. The majority of this group had been sharecroppers at one time. Some had had a higher tenant status and a few had actually been owner-operators at an earlier date. They had been mainly displaced by the forces that are operating to change the organization of southern agriculture at the

present time. The combination of small plots of land into larger ones, the use of an increased number of machines to do the work, and the unwillingness of the owner to continue the tenant system when the work could be done at a lower cost by using laborers have contributed to breaking the tie that many of these former tenants had to the land. Joining the group of permanent laborers, they have shared the experience described above for this group and have likewise found it necessary to enter the migratory streams in search for additional employment and income.

The remaining 11 per cent of the interstate migrants represented a group of workers who had no agricultural experience prior to their job in the west Kentucky strawberry harvest. They had been employed in villages, towns, and cities in industrial, trade and other urban occupations.

From the total surveyed number of interstate migrants, two main types were attracted to the west Kentucky area for the strawberry harvest in 1940. The first type was the first-trip migrant; the worker who began his migratory experience with the current move into Kentucky. Fifty-four per cent of the total 173 cases belonged to this type. The second type was the experienced migrant who worked in the area in previous years and returned seeking employment with the same grower that had hired him before. This type constituted 34 per cent of the total group.

Thus 88 per cent of the interstate migrants were either first-trip workers or "professionals" who sought work with the same employer year after year that they came into west Kentucky. Only 12 per cent of the sample group was composed of professional migrants.

who entered the area without previous employer contacts to follow. The small percentage of this class of migrants in the area is noteworthy and may be partly explained as follows:

First, the professional ordinarily does not find it remunerative to enter this area for the first time because a large number of recently displaced agricultural laborers and tenants migrate to west Kentucky without knowing the conditions of employment they will meet there or, at least, without having knowledge of other places to go. The first-trip migrants make it difficult for the professional migrant without previous employer connections to find steady employment during the strawberry harvest and depress the rate of pay below the level found in other states during the same time of the year. Many of the professional migrants know of these conditions and believe that they can do better for themselves by seeking work elsewhere.

Second, the short duration of the harvest season and the lack of its dove-tailing with other work opportunities, make employment in this area less attractive on the whole than that to be found in other places during the same time of the year. A small number of professionals, however, go into the area for the first time because they are not fully aware of the employment and earning disadvantages in west Kentucky or because they do not have anything better to turn to for the time being. From this group, nevertheless, is accumulated a number of workers who return in following years since they succeed in obtaining promises of future employment. The comparatively low earnings in strawberry picking unaccompanied by

other succeeding farm employment opportunities in this area, however, exercise a strong deterrent for the return of even these migrants.

2. Origin and migration routes

From the employment histories of the experienced interstate migrants, a picture was obtained of some of the regular routes followed by the professional pickers in their search for work during the year. Which of these routes were used and the type of variation introduced around them depended to some extent upon the state of origin. While 18 states were mentioned as those of permanent residence, 90 per cent of the 173 interstate migrants came from the eight states of Arkansas, Missouri, Louisiana, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and Illinois. Two-thirds of the group came from the first three of these eight states.

One of the frequently travelled circuits began with work in Louisiana or Arkansas berry fields, led from there to west Kentucky, continued to Berrien county in Michigan, and ended with the return to the point of origin with possible stops in Indiana, Missouri, or other neighboring states on the way back. Some of the pickers shortened this full circuit by returning to their point of origin after the Kentucky harvest. Others, from Missouri and Arkansas, for example, would work first in Arkansas, then go to Kentucky, and return home in time for cotton chopping in the summer. They would continue in the fall with cotton picking and fill out the winter with odd jobs.

A small number of migrants started in Florida before working in the berry harvests along the Mississippi valley. If they worked the

full season in Florida, they were able to pick up the seasonal sequence of picking in west Kentucky. If they left Florida before the end of the season there, they could begin either in Louisiana or Arkansas and make the full circuit stops from there if they so desired. After the harvest in west Kentucky, the Florida and other-source workers would split, some continuing to Michigan and others returning home.

Around these main routes of migration were woven variations by individual workers or families. Some would leave a certain place to branch over into another main route of migration. From these other routes, in turn, would come pickers for the Louisiana, Arkansas, Kentucky and Michigan circuit. At each place along the route, furthermore, would be added a complement of intrastate and non-migrant pickers.

C Non-Migrants

The sample revealed that there were 77 local workers in the sense of their not having had during the previous 12 months any job outside of the general locality in which employed when interviewed. The non-migrant character of this group of workers was further attested to by the fact that 97 per cent said that they lived in that locality the year around.

These local workers were mainly male, white, attached, of relatively young age and with eight years or less of schooling. Many in the group had children under 15 years of age with them in the work area. There were 16 of these children under 5 years of age and 62 between the ages of 5 and 15. The chief personal characteristics of the

non-migrant groups are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Percentage Distribution of Non-Migrant Workers, by
Sex, Race, Age, Schooling, and Family Status

<u>Sex</u>		<u>Age</u>		<u>Schooling</u>	
Male	79	15-24	17	Less 5 years	27
Female	21	25-44	67	5-8 years	64
		45 & Over	16	Over 8 years	9
<u>Race</u>				<u>Family Status</u>	
White	88			Attached	78
Negro	12			Unattached	22

The personal characteristics of this non-migrant group were different in several important respects from those described for the interstate group. Twenty-one per cent of these local workers were females while there was none in the interstate group. There was twice as high a percentage of attached workers in the local as in the interstate migrant sample. While the percentage of Negroes in both groups was small, it was twice as great among the interstate as among the non-migrant group.

The 77 local workers of the west Kentucky sample had had a variety of occupational experience. Some 64 per cent said that agriculture was their real work. There was an additional nine per cent who had had some previous agricultural employment. About 36 per cent either had no occupation which they claimed as their real work or named one in the industrial, trade, or domestic service field.

The 73 per cent who had had previous agricultural experience of some sort were rather evenly divided into three groups: Those who had never been employed in agriculture at a higher status than that of laborer; those whose highest status had been that of sharecropper; and those who had been either in a higher tenant status than sharecropping or who had been owner-operators. Some in the sharecropper group were workers who were helping in the strawberry harvest as part of their year's contract with the farm operator. The workers who themselves had been owner-operators had been, for the most part, on small and unfertile tracts of land from which they had been unable to obtain a satisfactory standard of living.

Although a large percentage of these workers had had previous agricultural experience and considered agriculture as their real work, 70 per cent of the group, it was found, had held one or more non-agricultural jobs in the 12-month period preceding the interview. This 70 per cent included workers who had entered the strawberry harvest because they were currently unemployed. It also included farm laborers and tenants who tried to round out a full year's work by means of seasonal and intermittent jobs or who were attracted to them because the rate of pay was higher than that they usually obtained in agriculture.

Non-agricultural employment was found in the city of Paducah, in one or more of the villages and towns in the vicinity, and on local dam, road, or other construction projects, in quarries, spar mines, hosiery mills, button, box, and shoe factories and the like.

The pickers had held jobs as road laborers, store clerks, fishermen, dredge-boat operators, factory hands, and as other types of unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled workers. A few former C.C.C. boys and dismissed or released W.P.A. workers were also found in this non-migrant group.

D Intrastate Migrants

Besides the interstate and non-migrant groups in the sample was a small one of 23 intrastate migrants. There were 22 whites and one Negro included in this sample segment. Nine cases were of the female sex. Only about 30 per cent gave agriculture as their real work.

Some of these intrastate migrants came from the coal mining sections of Kentucky, mostly from Muhlenburg county near Central City and from Johnson county near the town of Van Lear. Other points of origin were Hickman, Crittenden, Webster, Ohio, Grayson, and Harlan counties. Whole or partial families were found among these migrants. A frequent type of case was that of a coal miner's family whose chief breadwinner remained at home working at his occupation or with expectations of working in the near future while the wife and children migrated to the strawberry fields of west Kentucky. Older children of such families were also found picking berries, unaccompanied by their parents.

PART III

WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE STRAWBERRY
PICKERS IN THE AREA OF EMPLOYMENT

In a study of the level of living of several poverty groups in the rural society of this country, the following evaluation was made of the general standard of living of the migratory laborer: "..... The living conditions of this latter group are admittedly deplorable and shocking, described by the Secretary of Labor as 'A threat to the development of good citizens.' Their unfortunate situation is accentuated by the prejudice of local communities against absorbing migrant workers, both because of their undesirability and because it will probably increase their relief burden and other community expenses. They lack health protection and school opportunities, and have difficulty in getting public relief because they have no legal residence. Frequent campaigns to enforce local vagrancy ordinances, and the exercise of border controls against their interstate migration add to their difficulties. There is no opportunity for community participation of any kind."^{1/}

In describing the standard of living of the migrants as "deplorable and shocking", the authors had in mind either basic human needs being unsatisfied or the standard of living of the migrants falling far below what is generally recognized as a decent one for any worker in this country. Although this report is concerned with both of these bases of evaluating the working and living conditions of the migrants,

^{1/} Taylor, Wheeler and Kirkpatrick, Disadvantaged Classes in American Agriculture, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Social Research Report No. VIII, 1938.

the emphasis will be on a description of the way of life of the west Kentucky group and how their experiences differ from those of other migrants and of other rural poverty groups.

A Employment

One of the key factors in the low standard of living of the migrant is the lack of full employment. During normal times, 260 to 312 days of work during a year might be considered as approximately full employment. Only about half of the pickers of the west Kentucky sample had in the 12 months previous to the time of the interview as much as 200 days of work. Thirty-six per cent of the interstate and 27 per cent of the non-migrant group had 150 days or less of employment--an amount which is generally acknowledged as serious under-employment. Table 3 shows the percentage distribution of employment of the three mobility groups of workers.

Table 3

Percentage Distribution of Employment of Interstate, Intrastate, and Non-Migrants, By Number of Days Employed in Year Previous to Interview

Days Employed	Interstate	Intrastate	Non-Migrant
1-50	14	13	16
51-100	4	17	4
101-150	18	30	7
151-200	16	0	12
201-250	28	4	9
251 & Over	18	36	51
None Given	2	0	1
Total Per cent	100	100	100
Number cases	173	23	77

The conditions which give rise to the under-employment of the interstate migrant have been well described in the following statement: ". . . Necessarily, the migratory-casual worker wastes much time and motion because of the lack of proper direction into the nearest and timeliest field for labor. Even for seasonal work in which the date of the opening of jobs is known in advance, the worker often arrives at the job too late or too soon. He may be unaware of a labor shortage in a nearby community, or he may migrate in response to a rumor of a labor shortage only to find that the rumor had been spread so far that an oversupply of workers had arrived before him. In addition to the regular slack winter season there are a number of periods between jobs when, whether they wish it or not, workers are idle while waiting for new jobs to begin. Thus, the migratory-casual worker is faced not only with the imperfect adjustment of the supply of labor to the demand, but also with the difficulties resulting from the lack of direction of the workers."^{1/}

A different set of factors operates to explain the little amount of employment of the intrastate and non-migrant groups in western Kentucky. The chief factor of all is undoubtedly the general lack of balance between the amount of farm and factory work on the one hand and the number of workers willing to do such work on the other. This "depression" condition has been the experience of workers for many years. Along with this main factor should also be considered the fact that some of the workers do not seek regular work. They are the wives and children in family groups, seeking to supplement the low earnings of the chief agricultural breadwinner in the strawberry

^{1/} Webb, John--The Migratory Casual Worker, W.P.A. Monograph, Washington, D.C., 1937, p. 65.

harvest.

B Potential earnings

The daily earnings of a picker depend upon the rate paid per unit of work, the output per day or hour, and the number of hours worked. The rate of pay for harvesting strawberries in west Kentucky was uniformly set at $2\frac{1}{2}$ cents per quart during the period of the survey. This rate was fixed by the McCracken County Growers' Association, and all farmers, including non-members of the Association, adhered strictly to it.

While the number of quarts of berries a picker can harvest in a day depends upon a number of variables, the Farm Security Administration survey revealed that under typical conditions the average adult male was able to harvest about 54 quarts. With this output at the rate of $2\frac{1}{2}$ cents a quart, the average worker earned about \$1.35 a day. A family of three to four pickers was able to earn about \$4.00 a day. Considering the season is one of three to four weeks, that farmers do not harvest every day, and that regular employment during the season is rare under conditions of a surplus of workers, the average picker is not likely to earn more than a total of \$25 and the average family not more than \$75 during the harvest period.

C Family income

With much under-employment, many of the migrant families earn only a small yearly income. Fifty-five per cent of the interstate migrant families, it was found, had a family income, including all forms of non-cash payment such as free rent and other perquisites,

of \$300 or less during the year previous to the time of the interview. Only 16 per cent of the families interviewed had an income during that year of more than \$500.

Data showing the family income of the interstate migrants interviewed in western Kentucky are given in Table 4 along with similar data for other southern farm laboring groups.

Table 4

Percentage Distribution of Family Income of West
Kentucky Interstate Migrants and Other Rural Farm Groups

Family Income (dollars)	West Kentucky Interstate Migrants (1940)	Cropper and Other Share Tenants.(546 Plantations, 1936a/)	Family Income (dollars)	Non-Relief Share- croppers in South (1935 - 1936 ^{b/})	
				White	Negro
300 and under	55	48	Under \$250	3	12
301-500	25	42	250-500	27	45
Over 500	16	10	500 and over	70	43
Unknown	4	0	Unknown	0	0
Total Per cent	100	100	Total Per cent	100	100
Number Cases	173	6511	Number Cases	---	---

The family income reported by the west Kentucky interstate migrants is about the same as that of Negro sharecroppers and other share tenants on the 546 southern plantations studied by Woofter and others. If to the income of the plantation workers were added the value of housing and fuel, it probably would slightly exceed that of the west Kentucky group. There is a substantial difference between the income of the west Kentucky interstate migrants and that of both

a/ Data from Woofter, T. J. and others--Landlord and Tenant on the Cotton Plantation, W.P.A. Monograph, Washington, 1936, p. 222. (Income includes advances for sustenance, but not value of free rent and fuel.)

b/ Data from National Resources Committee--Consumer Incomes in the United States, Washington, 1938, p. 100. (Income includes food consumed, free rent, and all perquisites.)

white and Negro sharecroppers in the National Resources Committee study of non-relief farm families in the South during the period 1935-1936.

Both comparisons show that the interstate migrants are no higher and may be lower in their total family income than comparable groups in the farm working population of the South. Not only are they at the bottom of the income scale in the rural population, but a large percentage undoubtedly earns less than the amount needed by a farm family to provide the necessary elements for a minimum standard of living.^{1/}

Since over 25 per cent of the intrastate and non-migrant workers in the west Kentucky sample did not report usable family income data, their earnings are not included in Table 4. An examination of the cases in the two groups that gave the desired data, however, indicates that they are on approximately the same income level as that described for the interstate migrants.

D Public relief

Many of the west Kentucky pickers appear to have earned so little family income during the year for which data were obtained that they would have had to apply for public assistance of some kind. Only 16 per cent of the interstate and 23 per cent of the non-migrant group, however, reported having received any relief during the year. In this respect, they were not unlike the rural families in some of

^{1/} Taylor, Wheeler and Kirkpatrick, Disadvantaged Classes in American Agriculture, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Social Research Report No. VIII, 1938, p. 7. According to this study, various investigations have proved conclusively that \$300 for living costs is not enough to provide the necessary elements for a minimum standard for the farm family.

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the poorest areas of the South. During three widely separated months of 1935, for example, the percentage of rural families on relief in the eastern cotton area was found to be under nine per cent. In all probability, at no time during the year did it exceed 15 per cent.^{1/}

In the case of the professional interstate migrants of the sample, there were two other reasons that operated to keep down their relief rate. The first is the antipathy of this type of worker to "soup lines". He would not ask for such help unless it was in the form of an occasional overnight stop or unless forced to do so by a bad run of luck in finding employment of any kind.^{2/} The second reason is that they could not qualify for public relief under the type of residence restriction that was imposed by many communities.

E Schooling of children

Lack of regular community residence leads to far more serious losses on the part of the interstate migrants than merely being often ineligible for public relief. Chief among such serious losses are those of not being able to give their children the type of schooling which they should have and of not being able themselves to participate in the social institutions of the community.

The first indication of the inadequacy of the schooling of some of the children is found in the fact that they cannot attend a full term. Either the family is on the move at some time during

^{1/} Mangus, A.R., Changing Aspects of Rural Relief, W.P.A. Monograph, Washington, 1938.

^{2/} Webb, John op. cit., pp. X and XI

the school year or the work of the child is needed during some of the school days in order to increase the family income.

In the west Kentucky survey, the workers were asked how many weeks their children had attended school during the previous year. They were supposed to answer this question only for the children who were present in the family group at the time of the interview. Twenty-eight per cent of the 43 children had had less than 28 weeks and 69 per cent had had less than 31 weeks of schooling during the previous year. These attendance figures take on some meaning when compared with the full school term of 36 weeks found in the Northern states and the shorter term of about 30 weeks found in some of the Southern states. In such comparisons, it should be remembered, regular terms invariably are of five full days attendance per week, whereas for the children of the sample group it is not known with any degree of accuracy how many weeks of school attendance was reported on the basis of less than five full days. Although the data are thus an insensitive index to the full loss of time, they show rather clearly the disadvantage to which the children of interstate migrant families are liable to be put with respect to schooling.

Frequent migration is a basic cause of maladjustment, adversely affecting the cultural development of children particularly. It is significant, therefore, to have found that thirty-one per cent of the west Kentucky interstate migrants moved three or more times in the 12-month period before the time of interview. Over half of them had moved at least two times. Such moves probably mean that the child is taken out of one school and placed in another many times

during the years of formal education. This mobility is harmful to the development of the child. There is likely to be difficulty in forming normal friendship ties. He is continually in the role of the stranger in the school community. Suspicion and hostility are often his lot.

The schooling of the children of the non-migrants was under less of a handicap. Their families had neither intra nor interstate moves in the 12-month period so they thus had the opportunity of remaining in the same school. Although unable in many cases to attend for a full school year of 36 weeks, only six per cent had fewer than 28 weeks; whereas in the cases of the interstate migrants 28 per cent had that little.

F Community participation

By not having regular residence in a community the adult migrant found it difficult to participate in social groups. Forty-nine per cent of the interstate migrants studied in west Kentucky were without community memberships of any kind. In comparison, only 21 per cent of the non-migrant group showed this complete lack of participation in associations or special-interest organizations.

Ordinarily, the lack of such participation has serious consequences both for the individual and for the community in which that individual has temporary or permanent residence. In Southern farm communities in particular, the individual through being a member of a church group has many social contacts, gets opportunities of serving in a useful role on projects of one sort or another, and usually is accorded the respect of other people. Without such membership, the resident is apt to have lower social status. He

may not be accorded the role of a full citizen of the community, being looked upon as an outsider or stranger.

Whether the interstate migrants were at least able to satisfy their desire for friendships and other intimate contacts outside of formal neighborhood and community groups is not indicated by the data. There is reason to believe, nevertheless, that the situation in which they often find themselves is not the kind in which it is easy to build that type of relationship. Usually there is no provision made by the grower for a common recreation place in which the pickers can get together. Even with such accommodations, however, there would still be the important fact that pickers work in the same vicinity for so short a time that they do not have much of a chance to get to know other workers in a really satisfactory way.

The loss by the community of the lack of participation of the workers is no less real although it is not a matter that can be easily measured. Hostile attitudes can easily arise between such workers and other groups in the community. In the conflicts that take place both sides suffer. The experience of California communities with migrant workers during the past 10 to 20 years shows that this situation can arise.

When the situation does not lead to open conflict, there is still the fact that the outside group is not integrated with the attitudes and objectives of the community. Without this integration, they do not readily respond to the usual social controls exercised in the community for the preservation of the standards of the larger group. Through ignorance or indifference they do not observe

local customs, sometimes become minor civil offenders, and almost always make little or no contribution to the attainment of the goals of the community. In general, it might well be taken as a working principle of community organization that the safety and progress of any particular element in a society is best served through the well being of the whole group. The ways in which interstate migrants can be tied into the life of the community remain to be worked out. It is enough here to point out that the west Kentucky workers were not integrated into community life and to suggest some of the dangers in the situation.

G Housing

One of the important elements in the general standard of living of the migrants and one which might in part account for the low level of their participation in informal and formal social groups is to be found in the kind of housing which they have in the work area. The quality of their housing is generally very poor. How far below a standard that might be accepted as reasonable is well indicated by the following description of what the migratory worker usually gets: "They accept the meager shelter provided by chance. They occupy abandoned huts and shelters. They improvise shacks for temporary shelter. They live under bleak unsanitary conditions. They leave their unsightly quarters to be used by others and they carry with them to new locations disease germs and the seed of poverty and dejection..."^{1/}

^{1/} U.S. Department of Agriculture, Report of the Interbureau Coordinating Committee on Rural Housing, April 14, 1941.

This description might well be applied to the conditions found among the interstate migrants in the west Kentucky area. The majority lived and slept in tobacco and hay barns. The number of occupants varied with the number of migrant pickers employed by the farmer rather than by the size of the barn. From 10 to 15 persons was the usual number in one of these places, but in some there were as many as 25. The next most frequent type of shelter was a crude one-room cabin or other dilapidated outbuilding. From three to 10 persons usually lived in these structures. Other places included automobile garages, tool sheds, wagon sheds, smoke houses, sawmill sheds, tents, and abandoned church or school houses. In the Paducah region, all of such places had been left in extremely poor physical condition by the 1937 flood.

These conditions are only partly revealed by the schedule data on the type of housing in which the interstate migrants were found at the time of the survey. Only 17 per cent was found in a structure that was dignified with the name of house. Thirty-one per cent was listed as occupying barns. Nine per cent had labor cabins. Twenty-five per cent either had no housing or was in quarters that could best be described as miscellaneous. Finally, 18 per cent had their own tents.

Almost all of these accommodations had extremely inadequate toilet, water, lighting, cooking and other facilities. The workers living in barns usually had no toilet facilities and were compelled to use the wooded area around them. Other places had an open-pit privy which served all the migrants who were working on the patch.

Water was obtained from an out-door pump, well, or spring that often was obtained from the camping ground to be used conveniently or regularly. Cooking, for the most part, was done over an open fire or on a wood stove. A large number of migrants owned or were provided with kerosene lamps. Some workers were completely without lights. While most of the families had some bedding and cooking utensils, the unattached persons usually travelled very light, having at the most a blanket and a few pots, pans, or skillets for eating.

The accuracy of this generalized description is indicated by the schedule data on the housing facilities of the whole group of 273 sampled workers. Some of the basic characteristics of the lighting, water supply, cooking and screening they had at the time of interview are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Percentage Distribution of Living Conveniences
of
Strawberry Harvesters in Western Kentucky

<u>Lighting</u>		<u>Screens and Windows</u>	
Kerosene	76	No windows	43
Electric	6	Windows - no screens	30
Campfire	2	Windows - screens	23
Other	1	No housing	3
None	15	Unknown	1
<u>Water Supply</u>		<u>Cooking Facilities</u>	
Well	66	Kerosene stove	27
Pump	9	Wood stove	33
Cistern	10	Campfire	31
Spring	10	Coal stove	2
City Hydrant	4	Gas stove	1
Unknown and other	1	Other	6

From the table data can be seen some of the conditions which indicate the very low level of the housing facilities of the workers. Forty-three percent had no windows and 30 percent more had windows which were not screened. In the case of both of these groups, there was great difficulty in keeping out flies, mosquitoes and other insects. Such lack of protection is liable to have serious consequences because of the prevalence of malaria and other diseases in the low areas bordering the Mississippi River and a few of its tributaries.

Only four percent of the workers had hydrant water. The others depended on sources outside of the house. In two-thirds of the cases, a well was used. Although a well can be sanitary or unsanitary, many of those in the west Kentucky area would be classified by almost all observers as too unclean for the desired protection from disease.

Other conditions that clearly were not satisfactory are found in the fact that 15 percent had no artificial lighting of any kind and in the fact that 31 percent had no better means of cooking than that provided by an open camp fire.

An explanation of why the strawberry growers do not provide better housing conditions than those described above is found in the low net income obtained on the average from the growing of berries and in the fact that the farmer's only need for seasonal labor on a large scale is for this crop. The average grower, it may be estimated, gets a net return of less than \$250 for his season's crop of berries. He uses the pickers he hires for a period of less than 5 weeks. For such a short period and from such a small amount of net income, the grower may not be economically justified to provide much better housing facilities than those immediately available on his farm.

It should also be remembered in any interpretation of the kind of worker-housing provided by the grower that the accommodations of the farmers themselves in the west Kentucky area are, for the most

part, none too good. The 1940 Census data on some 130,000 farm houses in the five counties that were included in the west Kentucky sample confirm this observation: About 47 per cent of these houses were judged to be in need of major repairs. Major repairs were defined as those needed on parts of the structure such as floors, roof, plaster, walls, or foundation, the continued neglect of which would impair the soundness of the structure and create a hazard to its safety as a place of residence. Ninety-seven per cent of the structures were without running water and without an inside toilet. Only 15 per cent had electric lighting.^{1/} The effect of such general standards in the vicinity upon the attitude of the grower is likely to be at least that of creating indifference to some of the conditions that have been described in this report as characteristic of the housing afforded the pickers.

PART IV

CONCLUSION

Many more characteristics of the migrants could have been described and many more of their living conditions could have been revealed. Enough has been written, however, to indicate that these workers are living on a plane far below that which might be accepted by the American people in general as a decent one. This sub-standard level of living is not only a disadvantage to the workers. It has its dangers for the communities in which they live. It constitutes a drag on the progress of rural society and on the nation as a whole.

^{1/} U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, - Characteristics of Housing, Kentucky, 1940. Series H-4, No. 33, p. 5.

Along with the story of who the migrants are and how they live has been given a description of the conditions of their employment. Their occupational backgrounds, the forces that account for their becoming migrants, their search for work, the methods by which they are recruited, and the ways in which their labor is used while on the job have been touched upon. Even though only a part of this story has been told, it is enough to indicate a casual and poorly organized labor market. Such lack of organization can exist successfully in the sense of getting the work done only as long as there is a large number of unemployed and under-employed workers ready at hand from which to choose those who might be needed for strawberry picking. The work may thus get done without any damage to the crop, but it is done without much regard for the welfare of the individuals who do it. Such working and living conditions, moreover, do not insure the attachment of a reasonably permanent farm labor supply to this or any other part of the agricultural industry. Substantial numbers in this labor supply may be expected to shift to other employments as such opportunities develop.